

(Washington, DC)- Congresswoman Gwen Moore and Senator Herb Kohl today announced that Milwaukee's Zablocki VA Medical Center, a major veterans' health care facility in Wisconsin's Fourth Congressional District, will receive \$32.5 million for a new Spinal Cord Injury Unit (SCI) under the Continuing Appropriations Resolution for FY 2007.

Last year, Congresswoman Moore sent a letter signed by Wisconsin delegation members Sen. Herb Kohl, Sen. Russ Feingold, Rep. Tammy Baldwin, Rep. Mark Green, and Rep. Ron Kind to VA Secretary R. James Nicholson expressing their strong support for the funding. When the House FY2007 Military Quality of Life Appropriations bill did not include funding for Zablocki's SCI Unit, Congresswoman Moore offered an amendment to that bill to reinstate the funding. That bill was later taken up by the Senate, where Senator Kohl fought in the Appropriations Committee to ensure that funding was included for the new SCI Unit.

"The Zablocki Spinal Cord Injury Unit routinely treats our veterans with some of the most specialized and complicated medical treatments in use today. Our veterans, including the many brave men and women who served our country in Iraq, deserve the best medical care available. This upgrade at Zablocki will bring cutting-edge medical technologies to Wisconsin's veterans, and I'm pleased that the VA has signaled that this important project is now moving forward," Kohl said.

"We're talking about our nation's veterans – heroes by any measure – who have lost the use of their legs and arms and often the ability to live independently," Moore said. "A state-of-the-art SCI Unit is long overdue at Zablocki. Considering their many sacrifices, the least we can do is provide these veterans with the best technology available."

BACKGROUND ON ZABLOCKI MEDICAL CENTER

Zablocki Medical Center is the only VA unit that treats spinal cord injuries in Wisconsin, and only one of 23 in the United States, with its spinal cord injury unit treating approximately 500 veterans as inpatients and providing service to 10,000 outpatients annually. The \$32.5 million in funding will improve patient care, maximize patient services and quality of life as it creates a new

building that will include 38 patient beds. The new SCI unit will help thousands of veterans deal with irreversible paraplegia and quadriplegia, disabilities that are catastrophic to both veterans and their families.

The existing Spinal Cord Injury Unit at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center was established in 1972. The SCI unit is on two retrofitted acute care wards on the 10th floor of the Medical Center. Limitations of space and technology in the current location have made it impossible to keep the SCI unit abreast of the evolution of SCI medicine over the past thirty-three years. These facilities do not currently meet the current standards as set by JCAHO, the VA's space criteria, or the life and safety evacuation criteria. As of now, the SCI unit does not have rooms that were built to contain all the equipment needed by the veteran as he/she works to achieve optimal independence, and the unit's multi-patient rooms make it virtually impossible to meet expectations for patient privacy.

Even with the limited space and outdated technology, the SCI unit at Zablocki VA Medical Center boasts a very dedicated staff. The structural upgrades and new equipment afforded by this funding will bring Zablocki up to speed with the spatial and technology requirements that are needed to ensure that the staff can serve our veterans properly and more efficiently.

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